

Montana's Circle of American Masters

Inspired by Our Lands...made by Our Hands

Object: Trunk | Size: 32" x 17" x 10" | Materials: Self-processed buffalo rawhide, natural earth paints, bone paintbrush, trade cloth, Indian tanned deerhide lacing

Artist Background: Al Chandler Goodstrike, Traditional Hide Preparation, Construction and Decoration | Medium: Leather, earth paints

Al Chandler Goodstrike was born on April 17, 1936, on the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation and is an enrolled member of the White Clay People (Gros Ventre). He was raised by his grandparents and remembers his grandfather making bridles and saddles out of leather. Later, he was sent to an Indian boarding school in Pierre, South Dakota, where he learned Lakota arts and skills, including hide tanning.

In 1955, Al hitchhiked off the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation and joined the US Air Force, where he trained as an Airborne Radio Operator and accumulated 5,000 flight hours, many of which were overseas in the Far East and North Africa. In 1963 he received a certificate in electronics from Northern Montana College in Havre and two years later began his career with Xerox Corporation.

Although employed in "corporate America," Al remained rooted in his Indian heritage and lived in the two worlds successfully. He served on powwow committees and took part in Indian events in Canada, Wyoming, North and South Dakota, and Montana. He traveled with his wife Carole and their children, Scott, Sean, and Dawn to many powwows where the family danced together in regalia that Al made. When he retired in 1992, he returned to Fort Belknap and devoted himself to the traditional arts. Mostly by "trial and error," he learned to make and paint buffalo robes, an art that had nearly died out.

Today, Al is widely known for his tipi and hide painting. He also makes rawhide shields, rattles, parfleche bags and other traditional objects. He creates everything the "ancestral" way, scraping and tanning his own hides, making pigments and paints made from natural earth ingredients, and using his own handmade brushes.

He sees his art as part of a revival of awareness among the people of his tribe. He says, "Even our language is fading away, but they are trying to revive it. There is going to be a time that this kind of work I do is also going to be revived."

Al received a Best of Show Award at the American Indian Arts Festival in Dallas for a painted buffalo robe, and he also won first and second places at the Santa Fe Indian Market for a painted buffalo robe and drum. His work has been purchased for private collections, and he has attended markets throughout the US.

Al visits area public schools to help children learn the craft of working with rawhide. He has worked at the White Clay Immersion School to help revitalize the culture by teaching students how to make hand drums, drumsticks, and traditional music. He has represented his people's traditions through demonstrations at the Seattle Folklife Festival and has lent his work for a two-year Montana Arts Council traveling exhibit in nine museums across the state.



Alexandra Swaney photo

Lesson Plan: Montana Standards for Arts: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6

<http://www.opi.mt.gov/Accred/cstandards.html>

Indian Education Essential Understandings: 1, 2, 3, 4, 6; essential understandings 5 and 7 can easily be incorporated in this lesson through expanded history lessons about reservation development and government. <http://www.opi.mt.gov/indianed2/IEFAGuidance.html>

Goals and objectives:

The learner will gain an understanding of the history and traditions of the Gros Ventres or White Clay People, through research of design and stories. Then they will create their own sample of a hide painting that will tell a story of their own past.

Al Chandler Goodstrike's paintings compare tribal life of today to the past, showing what his people had, their pride and respect for each other, their laws, and their willingness to work together. He wants tribal members to remember how past tribal members suffered and paid for what the present members now have. He is concerned about their young people and hopes that he and others can be good mentors. He creates his artwork to pass on history, traditions, and to help build self-esteem in the young. His designs are based on what his grandparents, who were his mentors, expressed to him, and he does not copy others' work; instead he develops and paints his own designs.

Warm-up/pre-project preparation:

- Resource for general information on Montana Native American culture: Museum of the Plains Indian www.browningmontana.com/museum Also consider reserving the Montana

Historical Society's footlocker Lifeways of Montana's First People
<<http://mhs.mt.gov/education/footlocker/default.asp>>

- Discuss the changes in Native American life from before European settlement to the present.
- Look up reservations of Montana, locate them on a map and compare to previous or traditional territory. (Additionally students can research when each reservation was established.) Montana Office of Public Instruction Indian Education: <<http://www.opi.mt.gov/indianed2/IEFAGuidance.html>>
- Look at traditional and contemporary Native American paintings and discuss the designs and styles:
For traditional paintings - University of California San Diego Plains Indian Ledger Art Project, <http://plainsledgerart.org/index.pila> For contemporary paintings - the gallery at Kevin Red Star's website, <<http://www.kevinredstar.com/>>
- Have students talk to a family member to learn a story of their own history that might inspire their future.
- Have students look for designs in books and on the internet, and draw images for their own story.

Materials needed:

- Leather scraps or similar material, like canvas
- Wire hangers, or wire or wooden hoops
- Lacing or twine
- Mud or dry clay
- Charcoal, chalk pastels, or graphite
- Various types of berries, crushed
- Starch or glue
- Twigs, bones and/or brushes
- Bowls to mix paint in
- Graters or knives for scraping pastels into powder
- Note: Paints can be used if teacher does not want to create natural painting mixtures
- Leather punch or awl

Project:

Have students:

1. Pull the hanger into a rounded or square open shape, if using a wire hanger. If using a metal or wooden hoop, use as is.
2. Using the leather punch or awl, punch holes around the edge of the leather and place material in the center of the hoop frame. (If using canvas, fold over the edges of the fabric and glue down to create a thicker, stronger, re-enforced edge all the way around before punching the holes.)
3. Tie one end of the lacing onto the hoop, using a regular knot. Insert the other end of the lacing through one of the holes in the leather or canvas. Pull the lacing back up to the hoop, wrapping it once tightly around the hoop. Bring the lacing down through another hole, then back up around the hoop again and so on, until the leather is stretched tightly and evenly inside the hoop.

4. After the leather or canvas is attached to the hoop, create the “paint.” If using berries or other materials, first crush them up with a fork or spoon. Use grater or knife for charcoal, pastels or graphite. Then mix them together with the mud or dry clay and starch or glue.
5. Paint the design onto the leather using regular commercial brushes or with brushes they create from bones, twigs, plants or feathers. If using natural materials for brushes, encourage students to experiment with all parts of the bones, plants or feathers. Designs may be drawn on lightly first before painting.
6. When finished, have students share their story with others.

Cross curriculum:

- Social Studies: Migration and the settling of the Western United States
- Indian Education for All: History of reservations and the changes to the social structure of the Native American people
- Montana History: How Montana was settled and the impact on the Native Americans of Montana
- English and Art: How pictures can tell stories and preserve tradition and history

Evaluation:

- Students stayed on task and followed directions
- Students properly stretched the leather or canvas
- Students experimented with appropriate materials to mix their own paints
- Students researched a family story by talking to parents or grandparents
- Students painted designs that expressed the story
- Students were respectful of each other’s stories

Variations:

Brown Kraft paper that has been crinkled and smoothed can be used to paint a story on if no other material is available. The paper can be folded into a parfleche or ripped along the edges to give it an irregular shape resembling a hide.

Vocabulary:

Parfleche – a bag made of a soaked, scraped and stretched animal hide that is not tanned

Tipi – a Native American tent that is cone-shaped held up by several long poles that meet at the top. Tipis (or tepees) were traditionally made from hides but newer tipis are made of canvas.

Hide – the skin of an animal

Migration – when groups of people (or animals) move together from one area or region to another

Mentor – an older and more experienced person who helps guide a younger person

Self-esteem – self-respect; to have confidence in yourself

Role models – a person who sets a good example for others

Think About It!

Take a look at Al Chandler Goodstrike’s work on the Montana Arts Council website:

<<http://art.mt.gov/folklife/hearthand/gvtipi.asp>> and also

<http://art.mt.gov/folklife/folklife_goodstrike.asp>

- What do you like about his artwork?
- Can you see a story in his hide and tipi paintings?
- Why do you think he takes the time to make his own paints?
- Why does he make his own brushes?
- Would his work look different if he did not use traditional materials and processes?
- What could you do to be a good example and a mentor for others, especially younger children?

Lesson plan:

Cheryl Bannes, artist-in-residence, Lewistown, Montana

Direct questions to:

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Further resources at: www.art.mt.gov

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